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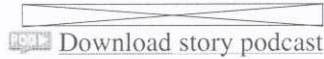
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An era of altruism

Volunteers can carry Riverside, region through tough times



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By RON LOVERIDGE

Now, more than ever, it is time to come together to help our fellow residents. It is time to take responsibility and do what's right.

The economic crisis has hit all areas of Riverside. The evaporation of wealth has limited charitable donations, and tightened state and local budgets have deprived nonprofit groups of their most dependable revenue stream. Hospitals, nursing homes, schools, senior centers and nonprofit groups especially are feeling the pain. With more and more people seeking assistance, agencies throughout Riverside need volunteers to help fill the gaps left by the economic crunch.

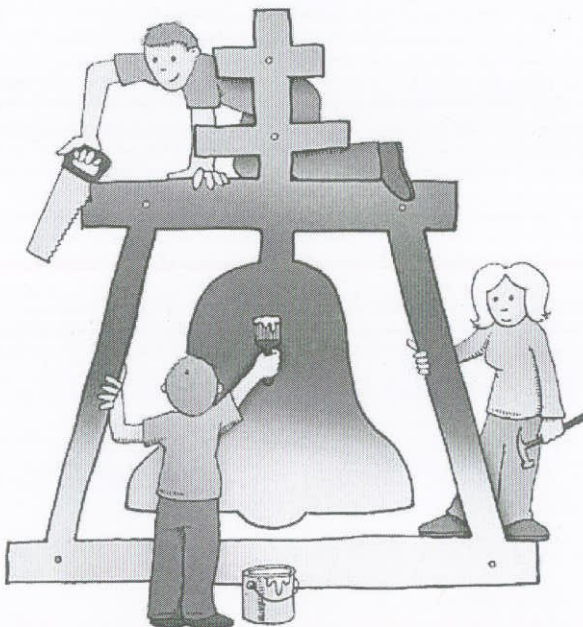
In his inaugural speech, President Barack Obama called upon all Americans to pitch in and give back. His presidency has ushered in a new era of responsibility for all Americans.

Effects of the economic crisis may vary, but evidence of the pain is everywhere we look: at our kitchen tables, in our neighborhoods, and in local businesses both large and small.

During this economic crisis, we need to join together to assist vulnerable individuals and organizations within the city of Riverside and the region. As residents, our community is our responsibility.

Those who dedicate their time and skill to helping others have a unique opportunity to become community leaders. In addition to earning a feeling of goodwill, volunteers can gain valuable work experience and insight into the culture and practices of the nonprofit world, experience which may lead to future employment. There is also an opportunity to network with board members and leaders of nonprofit agencies.

Story continues below



Many public and private agencies have been forced to reduce staff due to budget cuts, yet the services they provide remain in demand. Volunteer agencies still must fill the gap.

The nonprofit agency Volunteer Center of Riverside County is an excellent resource that links people to organizations in need of volunteers. To sign up with the volunteer center, visit www.vcrivco.org.

Many opportunities are also available with the city's Municipal Volunteer Program. This program provides residents with an opportunity to learn about city government and operations, to form mutual partnerships with city staff, and to build community relationships. Participants gain marketable skills by teaming up with various city departments. Visit www.riverside.ca.gov/volunteer to sign up for the program.

Riversiders are already answering the call for service. In February 2009 alone, 317 volunteers donated 6,151 hours to the city of Riverside. This is equivalent to the work performed by 38 full-time employees for four weeks!

We must continue to band together and give of ourselves to keep Riverside strong and to help those less fortunate pull through these tough times.

To rephrase President John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural quote, "Ask not what City Hall can do for you, but what you can do for Riverside." I urge you to answer the call.

Ron Loveridge is the mayor of Riverside.

How to help

The economic crisis means we have more opportunities to support our communities. To get involved, please contact an agency in your region:

Riverside County: www.riversideca.gov/volunteer

www.vcrivco.org

San Bernardino County: <http://hss.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/VIP/>
